

Alone Again

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Summary: A short fic on how the Master Chief feels, after the ending of Halo 2. Some small cosmetic changes to the fic previously known as 'On the Ship, Alone'

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A/N: Slight amendment from the previous version - changed the title, because it was rather unwieldy, and fixed some small grammatical/continuity errors (I think), since I read the Dietz book. Better than I expected, I suppose.

* * *

>It was hard being alone in his own head again.

As far back as he could remember, there had always been others. First the Dr. Halsey and other children from the SPARTAN project, sharing his training, his purpose. Forging each and every one of them into a weapon of mass destruction. Then Commander Keyes, Sergeant Johnson and the entire shipside contingent of Marines, all of whom looked up to him as some sort of mechanized war god. Even when he was battering his way through the Covenant and the Flood on Halo, miles from any other human help, there had been the acerbic presence of Cortana. She, at least, treated him as human. Even if technically neither of them were.

But now he was unthinkably far from anyone else, on a ship burning hard for Earth.

The Brutes didn't count, of course. Aside from being bent on his own annihilation, they were also notoriously stupid. Neither did the Grunts. Nor the Prophet of Truth. All he wanted was someone to talk to, to be listened to, to be, in fact, his friend. Even super soldiers have their doubts. And dreams.

He had had no other choice, of course. It was his duty. His sole purpose for existing.

He was mankind's sole remaining hope in the war with the Covenant. Duty was literally bred in his bones. It had been the logical thing to do. The right thing to do. He knew he could infiltrate the ship and assassinate the Prophet of Truth easily. It was child's play to him. Scenarios such as this had been staples of the SPARTAN training between the ages ten to twelve.

So why did he feel like a traitor? Like he had betrayed her?

It was a war. People die in wars. Fathers bury their sons, super soldiers bury their comrades. And move on. He had watched countless Marines and fellow Spartans die in a variety of bloody ways. He had caused the equally messy deaths of countless more Covenant troops. So why did leaving one AI behind affect him so? It wasn't as if she couldn't take care of herself.

He was worried for her. A little afraid, even.

He had no doubt (except for the look in her eyes) that she **WOULD** survive (and the way she spoke) and that they would be reunited on Earth (that last farewell), heroes again. Then they could take a vacation on Earth together. See a shopping mall, instead of endless quartermaster stores (she wouldn't even have to forge any requisitions. He was sure he had a great deal of back pay coming.) Eat French food instead of grey military glop (well, for him, anyway. She would doubtlessly complain about the inefficiency of organics and try to convince him to install a power socket.) Wander around aimlessly while she tried to give him directions to the nearest Pelican.

S_he was, after all, his only friend._

And in return, he hoped, he was her friend, as well. It was hard to tell with an AI.

The only one who understood what it was like, to be not quite human.

Like two Tin Men searching for a heart together, in the land of Oz. He had never read the story, of course, but Cortana had mentioned it to him before, in one of her rare introspective moods. He wondered if the story had had a happy ending. Or if the Tin Men had been abandoned to fend for themselves once the war had ended.

The only one who understood what it was like, to have no life outside of work.

After the first Halo, after his return to Earth, he had spent countless hours simply lying in his bunk staring at the ceiling. Aimless. Adrift. Until he had worked up his nerve to call Cortana up and ask her what she did on her time off. Which, as it turned out, she didn't have.

AIs were always on duty. Always on call for the next crisis. Just like him.

It had left him with the unenviable problem of explaining the concept of time off. Which had led to the even less enviable problem of trying to convince her to spend the aforesaid time off talking with him. Which led, in turn, to even more thorny problems such as explaining the concept of socializing to her, a subject he was hardly an expert on. Still, he had enjoyed it. It was a welcome change from fighting for his life.

And he might never see her again. Never talk to her again.

The very thought filled him with a nameless dread he could not articulate, like a vise around his heart.

It was, quite simply, unthinkable.

Yet it hovered around his mind like a shadow.

He refused to let his mind dwell on it. Concentrating, instead, on the job at hand.

He was running faster than ever before. If his shooting had been accurate before, it was positively demonic now. No actions were wasted, not a single shot expended unnecessarily. He was a graceful shadow dealing death to all he met.

After all, the sooner he was done, the sooner he could turn the ship around and head back.

Back to Cortana. And then, together, they would win the war. Maybe then he would finally get that vacation with her.

If she was still alive by then.

He crushed the thought and moved on.

End
file.